

HOUSTON COUNTY

Honorable Brad Mendheim and Honorable Denny Holloway

Houston County Courthouse
P.O. Drawer 6406
Dothan, AL 36302
(334) 677-4848



Mary Paulk
Melissa Medford
Pam Soloman
Fred Gray
Tracy Nelson
Dr. Hobbs
Angela Underwood
Peggy Blakeney
Doug Valeska
Lamar Glover
Mark Culver
Sheryl Walker
Linda O'Connell
Gerald Love
Charlotte Williams
Betty Peters
Lori Gilley
Locy Baker
Warren Beck

Steve Clouse
Joe Carothers
Harri Anne Smith
Jimmy W. Holley
Charlotte Kirkland
Phillip Calvert
Keith Givens
Connie Jenkins
Susan Trawick
Ed Dorsey
Tony Gonzales
Sheryl Walker
Ed Enloe
Jenny Stephens
Wade Jones
Virginia Jones
Lori Gilley
Jenny Stephens
Joan Carpenter

Rosalind James
Rearfield Vester
Phyllis Lodgsdon
Stacy Robinson
Susie KingryCindy Skipper
Ann Marie Schwartz
Jaime Stuckey
Linda Sanders
Marian Loflin
Rebeckah Troutman
JoAn Avant-Breth
Barbara Thorton
Walt Bowers
Jeanette K. Ellis
Sharon McCray
Berta Blackwell
Kenneth J. Lord
Debbie Riggs
Lamar Glover

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Decrease Childhood Obesity
2. County-Wide Reading/Literacy Festival/Program
3. Develop transition programs from foster care to independent living.

Issues

Issues are the primary concerns or problems facing children in the county.

Health - Children's (0 - 19) physical and mental well-being in the county.

Decrease Childhood Obesity

Policy Council Action Steps:

- develop and implement a public awareness campaign to educate the community about the health and psychological consequences of childhood obesity
- develop Strategies to reduce obesity, and research funding opportunities through grants and other avenues to assist agencies and organizations in implementing strategies to reduce obesity

Safety - Children live free of abuse, neglect, crime, and drugs.

Increase in methamphetamine use in Houston County affecting multiple community sectors

Policy Council Action Steps:

- law enforcement and other social service agencies involved in the fight against methamphetamine will continue community education regarding dangers and consequences of meth production, use and addiction. Education will be provided to merchants, community members (civic, church, etc.), land owners/property managers, emergency responders and other medical personnel, school systems, etc.
- support treatment and recovery efforts in Houston County
- support family members support groups and education initiatives such as the recently organized MethAnon support group for family members of meth addicts.

Lack of alternative activities for youth

Policy Council Action Steps:

- support and encourage activities that are alcohol, tobacco, and drug free for youth

Juveniles need to be held accountable for their actions

Policy Council Action Steps:

- continue to seek funding sources for Teen Court

Education - Children learn the skills necessary to become productive citizens.

Continue to promote the awareness of the importance of literacy

Policy Council Action Steps:

- increase public awareness through media coverage, i.e. newspaper, television, billboards, special events
- continue and grow the literacy support of the county through civic groups, schools, businesses, and faith-based organization
- mobilize investment into a reading promotion initiative of such value to all stakeholders that it will grow and continue to serve far beyond 2005-2006

Create an awareness of the world of work with emphasis on work ethic and job preparedness to include public, private, and home-schooled children

Policy Council Action Steps:

- inform and invite students 16-19 to attend a career fair
- assist in community awareness education through community volunteers

Early Care and

Education - Children (0 – 5) are provided opportunities to fully develop emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively and are ready to succeed.

To provide developmentally appropriate literacy programs and service providers

Policy Council Action Steps:

Increase/provide parental awareness of health/safety issues for children birth to five years of age, including those with special needs

Policy Council Action Steps:

Economic Security

- Children grow up in a financially stable home where the child's basic needs can be met.

Lack of programs available for at risk youth transitioning from school, home/foster homes into independent living environments

Policy Council Action Steps:

- develop programs for youth that focus on life skills (i.e. budgeting, setting up bank accounts, parenting, renting an apartment, buying a car, etc.)
- develop programs for youth that focus on pre-employment skills (i.e. Resumes, job applications, interviewing skills, etc.)

Lack of affordable and dependable resources for low income families in the area of transportation

Policy Council Action Steps:

- Participate in the locally developed transportation/JARC committee
- Come up with strategies to improve access to transportation
- Work with legislature to focus on statewide transportation issues for low income families

Lack of affordable and dependable resources for low income families in the area of child care

Policy Council Action Steps:

- work with local Family Guidance Center
- come up with strategies to improve access and resources for subsidized childcare for low income families and working poor.
- work with local legislator to focus on statewide child care funding for low income families and the working poor

Parent Involvement and Skills

- Parents and guardians participation and effectiveness in fostering an environment for children to become mature, responsible and independent adults.

Increase early interventions, parenting skills programs, and resources to all aspects of the parent mode: grandparents, step parents, foster parents, teen parents, guardians.

Policy Council Action Steps:

- create increased public awareness of these programs
- develop a promotional brochure for parents

Provide structured and supervised programs and activities to pre-adolescents, especially high risk youth to include after school, summer, weekends, school holidays and intercessions

Policy Council Action Steps:

- make parents aware of available services and programs by creating and distributing promotional brochure
- seek additional funding to expand programs
- create stronger collaboration among all agencies providing after school activities to youth

Accomplishments

The Education Committee of the Houston County Children's Policy Council's goal for 2005 was to improve our literacy level since 54% of Houston County Citizens were at literacy Levels 1 and 2, with a Level 5 in literacy being the highest Level. We began to explore ways to improve this problem by viewing other areas that were successful with the promotion of literacy. Since Tifton, Georgia, was known as the Reading Capitol of the World, we traveled there to get ideas of ways we could improve in this county. Our Mayor Chester Sowell traveled to Tifton with us and met with their Mayor Paul Johnson where a Reading Challenge was started.

Book Drop Boxes were placed in all of our public schools, 5 of our 8 private schools, many churches, and businesses including our Chamber of Commerce, Sam's, Dothan City Government Office, Chick-fa-la, Chunka Wonka, and many more totaling 70 Book Drop Boxes. Houston County Schools painted 20 boxes and Northview High School and Dothan High Schools each prepared 25 boxes. These boxes were painted as castle walls with a 4 feet quarter inch plywood cutout of Sir Read-A-Lot nailed to the Box. The purpose was to place these boxes where everyone would see and know who Sir Read-A-Lot was and ask the community to donate books, in good condition, back to the community by placing them in these boxes. According to statistics, 75% of low-income families do not own 1 single book. We had no idea we would collect over 30,000 books and are currently in the process of re-distributing those books to our low-income families.

About 3,500 books were re-distributed at the festival on Friday and Saturday. A book went home with every child in both Early Head Start and our Head Start Programs (about 600) the last day of school in May. DHR received 600 books for their foster kids program and other programs they serve children through. Children's Rehabilitation Services has received 500 to give out at their clinics this summer. Daycare Programs in our county receiving financial assistance through DHR and Family Guidance Center will be getting a book for every child they serve to be sent home with that child. The summer programs will be getting books to give children they serve through the City of Dothan, Boys & Girls Club, and Girls Inc.

The Friday before Reading Week Beverly Middle School had a huge kick-off pep rally totally focusing on reading. Reading Week began with preachers talking about the significance of reading and the impact it has on our community from their pulpits. Sunday afternoon Wal-Mart was hosts to a kick-off where they provided cookies and drinks. Our Mayor, his family, Sir Read-A-Lot, his family, and our local Representative Locy Baker all discussed the wonderful week planned and invited everyone to all activities. Monday night, our Dothan Technology Center and Wiregrass Commons Mall hosted an Adult Spelling Bee. Teams consisted of 3 people per team and 18 teams participated. 51 participants enjoyed an evening of fun and promoted the love of reading. Some of the teams included The Dothan Eagle, our Mayor and other city officials, Kiwanis, Alabama Power Service Organization, The Radio People who own 3 radio stations in our area, The Education Foundation, The Civitan Club, the Jobs Task Force, the House of Ruth, and many others. Wednesday we had a Lunch Fest in the City Park where we invited all pre-school children and home-schooled children. Again, our Mayor Sowell talked of the significance of reading and we had the host of the Ann Varnum Show to tell stories.

We are currently working on having Accelerated Reader to be placed at our local public library this summer and will have our Rotary and Kiwanis' Clubs to compete with Tifton's Rotary and Kiwanis' Clubs to see who can read the most books. July 1st we are having a laser show, which will be kicked off by everyone reading the Preamble to the Constitution. Our goal is to exceed Tifton's record of having 7500 people in the same place at the same time reading the same thing. They are in the Guinness Book of World Record for this

accomplishment. Also, we adopted the "One Book, One City", and have requested they do the same and will measure how many of our citizens read this book by a simple discussion questionnaire. This three-pronged challenge will end in December 2005. We are hoping to become the Reading Capitol of Alabama as a result of all of these efforts.

- During Reading Week many schools had Authors to visit their schools, our State Superintendent, our US Regional Representative with the Department of Education, and many more guests joined us for Reading Teas, Reading Pep Rallies, etc.
- Field Trip for all 3rd graders in the county, including private schools was held at Landmark Park. All students received a chapter book & bookmark.
- An Adult Spelling Bee was held at Wiregrass Commons Mall where 18 teams of 3 per team (51 adults) participated
- Book Drop Boxes were placed all over the county and over 20,000 were collected and redistributed back into our county. This eliminated for Houston County the statistic of 75% of low-income families do not own 1 single book.
- The Dothan/Wiregrass Art League sponsored a bookmark contest for students in grades 6-8. The students created a bookmark promoting the theme and our mascot, Sir Read-A-Lot. Many bookmarks were presented and the winner's bookmark was given to all 3rd graders (1200) who attended the Friday Reading Festival Field
- The Creative Writing Club through Troy University partnered with us by sponsoring an essay competition. The topic was "What Community Means to Me", as we wanted them to focus on the importance of community service. All 3 winning essays were published in the Dothan Eagle, will be published in the Copper Blade Review in September (a yearly publication through the Creative Writing Club) and were guests on both of our televised talk shows. On the Charlie Platt Show, all three winners were able to read their essays aloud. Along with their parents, they were also guests at Wired Coffee, where they read their essays, on Tuesday, April 12, as part of Reading Week Activities.
- Verizon partnered with us by sponsoring a Bulletin Board Contest. 18 schools participated and the requirements of the Bulletin Boards were to be at the main entrance of the school, have our slogan and mascot on the board, have Houston County Reading Week April 10 – 16, 2005, and Reading Festival @ Landmark Park April 16th, 1-4. The winning school won a \$500.00 cash award to purchase books for their media center and Webb Elementary was the winning school.